



ADDRESS
OF
SENATOR CHARLES A. CULBERSON
AT THE
IROQUOIS CLUB BANQUET
CHICAGO

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INTERNATIONAL MORALITY.

MR. TOASTMASTER AND GENTLEMEN :

From my State I bring you encouragement and good cheer. All is well in that Commonwealth, and we are watching with deep interest the efforts which are making for success in other sections of the Union. Among the agencies engaged in this work none surpass this club, and I congratulate you upon this brilliant function, which cannot fail to redound to your fame as a host and to the advancement of those fundamental principles of party faith to which we are all devoted.

As the first Secretary of State under the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson laid the foundation of American diplomacy. Although menaced by hostile environments and embarrassed by selfish considerations, he so conducted the first great diplomatic controversy as to maintain the public faith unsullied and establish an advanced standard of conduct for all nations. On an occasion when the anniversary of the birth of this illustrious statesman and philosopher is celebrated, and in times when national honor is tarnished by political ambition and commercial greed, it is well to recall that there is an international morality which neither the importance of civic achievement nor the glamour of military conquest can obscure.

In the progress of the world, among modern States, the rule of the sword has been tempered, if not abrogated, by the law of nations, that system of right and justice which should obtain between them. Of what this law consists, in all its

ramifications, we need not now inquire, nor need we trace it from its origin to its present commanding proportions. It will suffice to say that it embraces the usages of civilized nations in international affairs, and its growth is the reflection of their external and moral development. It is an obvious philosophic truth that States, like individuals, are moral persons, and there is no happier augury of a progressive civilization than that moral principles are recognized as distinct sources of international law. The consequences which follow disregard of these principles by States are manifestly and immeasurably graver than those which result from individual infractions. With the manifold violations of positive law which they involve, comprehending in their sweep the great questions of neutrality, treaties and war, and the vast injury to States and countless thousands of their inhabitants, they often pass into the wider domain of morality, where the breach of national duty is so flagrant and redress so inadequate or impossible that it is cognizable alone in the forum of conscience and at the bar of an enlightened public opinion.

For the first time in our history as a people, in a single transaction, by its recent conduct in Panama, the Federal Administration distinguished itself in shame by adding to multiplied offenses against law the grossest moral delinquencies. To contempt of legal restraint which must challenge the solicitude of all patriots, to breaches of neutrality, to violations of precedents and treaty obligations, and waging an unjust though bloodless war, it added other wrongs to a defenseless Republic and left other and more ineffaceable stains upon our national integrity and character. This incident throughout was marked not alone by

repeated injustice, but by reproach and dishonor. The declaration of the Administration that it did not officially and publicly instigate the revolt, for that is the whole force of the denial, is fully accepted, and yet its conduct was tantamount to instigation and encouragement, and had that effect. What it failed to do officially and publicly was done personally and secretly. The friendly press and periodicals of the time abounded with inspired suggestion and advice of secession, and personal correspondence of the Administration encouraged editorial insistence upon revolution and immediate recognition. Foreign conspirators at Washington became the confidants of the Government and advised their confederates of the movements of the Navy with an accuracy and detail impossible except from foreknowledge. Upon the failure of the Senate of Colombia to ratify the canal treaty, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Mr. Cullom) was called to see the President, and immediately after the interview the Senator gave to a great newspaper, in August, 1903, three months prior to the rebellion, this significant and remarkable statement, which was no doubt published throughout this continent and in Europe:

“ Well, we might make another treaty, not with Colombia, but with Panama.”

“ But Panama is not a sovereign State, and is only a department of Colombia.”

“ Intimations have been made that there is great discontent on the Isthmus over the action of the Congress of the central government, and Panama might break away and set up a government which we could treat with,” was the reply.

“ Is the United States prepared to encourage such a schism in a South American Republic ?”

“No, I suppose not, but this country wants to build that canal and build it now. It needs it for its own defense, and it is needed by the whole world. The treaty is blocked by a country that has been treated well by us, and there are very weighty considerations which make us feel that at all hazards this great work should be undertaken at the earliest possible minute.”

There is no mistaking the mere language of this paper. If the suggestion may be pardoned in this presence, it is the vernacular of the West and is redolent of the prairies of this great State. But whence the inspiration, whence the thought of conflict and revolution? It would be gross misjudgment of character to suppose that this conception, which was an invitation to secede and a promise of recognition, was that of the distinguished but pacific Senator from Illinois, rather than of him whose very element is unrest and disorder, with whom arbitrary and despotic action is a passion, and to whom the tinsel and show and havoc of war are dearer than the sublimer glories of peace and civic righteousness. In the great legislative body where should reside the conservative and independent forces of our institutions, an effort was made to secure full inquiry into the conspiracy which wantonly deflowered Colombia of her fairest territory; but, in addition to positive suppression of diplomatic correspondence, an investigation was refused by a partisan majority. Had this investigation been allowed and the intrigue exposed the determining factor in the fabricated rebellion would have been traced by public inquiry not only to the threshold, but into the very portals of the Administration.

Having inspired the insurrection, it was natural, and comported with the peculiar honor which subsists even among vulgar and unpretentious plunderers, that the administra-

tion should keep faith with its puppets and confederates to the end. In confusing and guilty haste it anticipated and discounted the time for the revolt. It magnified the number and character of the insurgents, and officers of the government connived at a subterfuge to deceive and corrupt the forces sent to crush the uprising. It denied the authority of Colombia to suppress the revolutionary movement both prior and subsequent to its culmination. It invaded its territory by land and sea to accomplish its dismemberment upon the false pretense of preserving the freedom of transit across the Isthmus. It reversed the course of the Government for more than half a century and perverted the treaty of 1846 by proclaiming that the duty of maintaining free transit was primarily upon the United States, and that this mere easement was superior to the right of Colombia to sovereignty and self-preservation. Not content with these acts of illegality and turpitude, but seeking to give them the augmented force which attends success, and purposing to complete the spoliation, the Administration within two days recognized the mock government it alone created and upheld, and within two weeks, in the very midst of war, accepted a cession of the coveted territory from its allies and associates. Never before in our history has a revolutionary and seceding government been recognized without reference to what action might be taken by the parent State to enforce its authority over the revolting section. From Monroe to McKinley we presented the just and lofty example of insisting in such cases upon the "condition that recognition of independent statehood is not due to a revolted dependency until the danger of its being again subjugated by the parent State has entirely passed away."

It was left to the present Administration, in the case of a republic which we were the first to welcome into the family of nations in 1823, to trample upon the wise precedents of eighty years, and in a spirit of cupidity to reverse the policy which made this Government the exemplar of the world.

The specious defense of recognition by the President, in its last analysis, is founded upon the argument of kings, sometime called manifest destiny, impelled by the interests of collective civilization, which he properly characterized in his life of Benton as that which would "swallow up the land of all adjoining nations who were too weak to withstand us, a theory that forthwith obtained immense popularity among the statesmen of easy international morality." Indefensible and scandalous as others are, there is no phase of this lamentable affair from its inception to its close which is more dishonorable and more grossly perverse of moral rectitude than the breach of the treaty of 1846. By that treaty the United States guaranteed to Colombia against all foreign nations, including themselves, the territory of the Isthmus; yet, contrary to the broad spirit of this obligation, the Administration through a sham revolution has seized and appropriated the property. In consideration of the guaranty by the United States of the territory and neutrality of the Isthmus, Colombia guaranteed not only the freedom of transit across it, but other extensive and valuable rights and privileges wholly distinct from the Isthmus. If it be said in legal fiction that under present conditions the right of free transit comes from Panama, it remains true that the United States are holding Colombia to all other grants and privileges of the treaty when the consideration for them has absolutely failed.

The contemplation of the course pursued by the Administration in this great emergency can bring neither satisfaction nor pride to an American citizen. Admitting the transcendent importance of the enterprise, it did not justify the ignoble means employed and they were not necessary to its final accomplishment. There was involved in the undertaking no vital principle of free government, no overmastering consideration of patriotism, no magnanimous sacrifice for the elevation of mankind. The motive was selfish and mercenary, and the contest was between the ambition and avarice of the powerful and the rights and interests of the weak and helpless. It may be that the canal will be constructed during this generation. It may be that in our day majestic ships flying the battle flag of a great people will tell of its strategic value, and that it will offer a passage for the commerce of the world. If such prophecies shall be fulfilled, our gratification in the achievement will be marred alone by the infamy of its origin, by the just condemnation of history, and by the imperishable truth that "with nations, as with men, the law of progress is the rule of right."

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